The Governor Hunt House

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The restoration and documentation of the Governor Hunt House project involved many hardworking people. We would like to extend our thanks to everyone involved, especially:

Jonathan Jesup Restorations for their painstaking work in returning the house to its original beauty;

Jan Kobeski for the cover photo and numerous photographs throughout the booklet;

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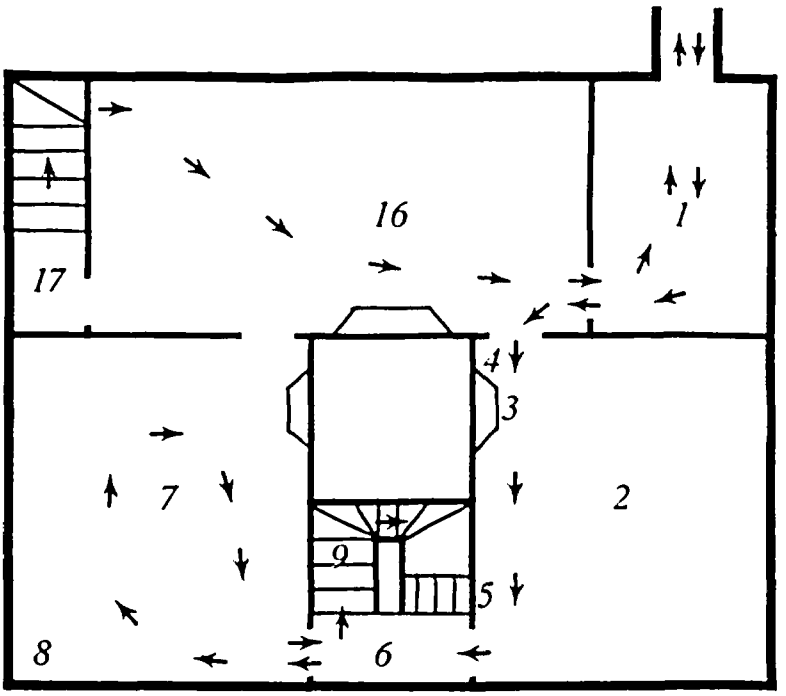
Special thanks to James Tabor for his editing expertise and to Jan Bennett for her creative input as art director for the brochure;

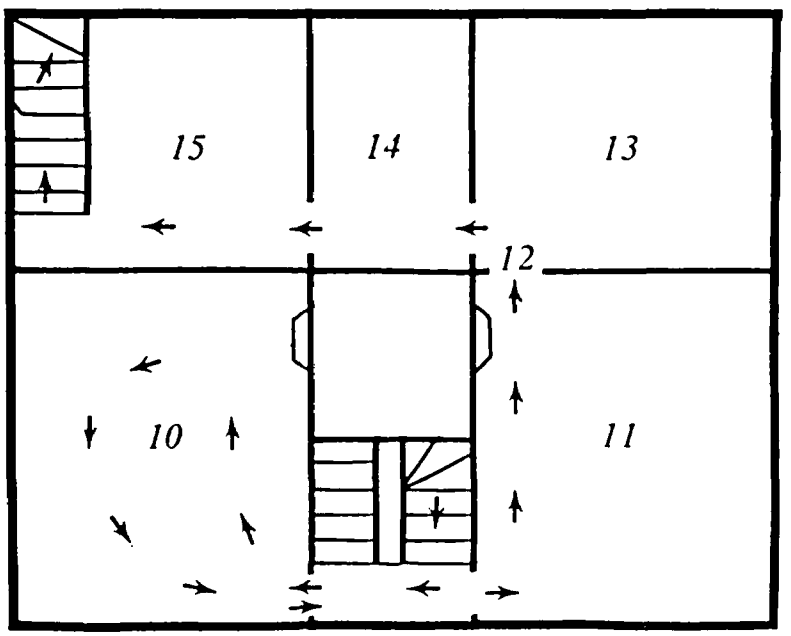
and, finally, to Caroline Weigand whose dogged detective work and energetic writing produced a truly magical history tour of the Governor Hunt House and its creators.

FIRST, LET'S TAKE A WALKING TOUR...

TOUR PATH



DOWNSTAIRS



UPSTAIRS

Jonathan Hunt built this house in 1789 on land he inherited from his father. By the time Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corporation bought the house in 1968, many changes had been made to the original interior. Wood panels had been painted; plaster ceilings had been added; stairways and walls had been moved around and doors added. It was the renovators' daunting task to restore the house to its original condition. After 16 months of work, we think they've created a finished product that is both aesthetically pleasing and historically accurate. We hope you enjoy your visit!

Our tour starts in the back of the house. Use the floor plan shown on page 4 to guide your tour; just follow the arrows through the numbered rooms.

BUTLER'S CHAMBER (1)

This first small room of the Governor Hunt House was probably used as a butler's chamber. In the 1700s, it was common for one head servant to sleep with the silver, china and other valuable belongings. It was also the servants' responsibility to keep all the fires going throughout the night.

PARLOR (2)

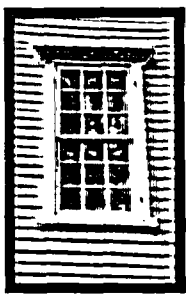
Going left through the kitchen brings you into the drawing room or parlor. The parlor was used for sitting, talking and spinning wool by the fire. A couch and a couple of chairs were probably placed close to the fire to keep their occupants as warm as possible.

Brick Bits

In the 1700s, artisans made bricks by piling clay blocks around fires. The bricks then dried, or "cured", to varying hardnesses depending on their closeness to the heat. The hotter (and harder) they became, the darker red or black they turned. Notice that the bricks in this fireplace are almost pink because they are so soft.

FIREPLACE (3)

Until the 1850s, fireplaces were very wide and deep. Though this was convenient for cooking, it did a poor job of heating because all the warm air was swept up the chimney instead of being thrown out into the room. If you touch the mortar between the bricks, you can feel how soft it is. This mortar was made of actual river clay dug from a pit near Vernon.



An unusual feature of this fireplace is the beehive oven. It's unusual to find a beehive oven in the parlor because baking was usually done in the kitchen. We're not sure why Governor Hunt located a beehive oven in his parlor. If the historically knowledgable among you can come up with a good reason, let us know.

The fireplaces in the house had been bricked over three times since original construction, in an effort to make them more efficient heaters. The grey brick in the back is original brick from 1789. The small square to the right of the fireplace was probably used for warming liquor (possibly for traveling rectors who dropped by for a visit).

ORIGINAL FLOOR PATTERN (4)

If you look in the corner by the door to the kitchen, you notice that several flooorboards are perpendicular to the rest of the floor. At some point, a new floor was laid, with the boards arranged as you see these few corner boards. However because of the layout of the floor, we assume that the original floor looked like you see it now.

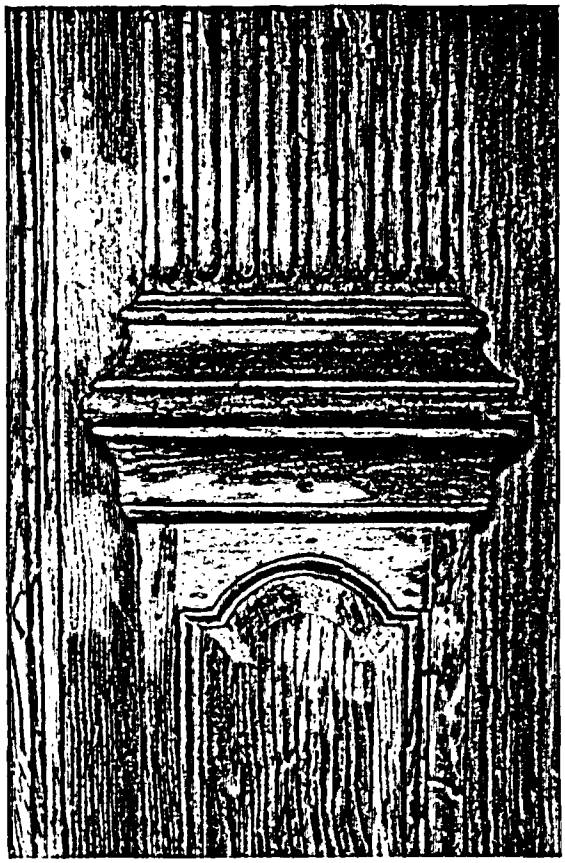
CELLAR STAIRWAY (5)

Inside the door to the cellar, you can see where paint was scraped. The brown color is the inspiration for the color of the kitchen. This stairway to the cellar had been closed and was a closet when the restoration project started. However, in the cellar stairway you can see where the board overhead was cut into an arch. The cellar entrance had been moved to a hatch door in the kitchen. Wear marks along the cellar wall confirm that the restoration experts returned the stairway to its proper location.

The paneling in this room was left natural to enhance the beauty of the knot-free pine wainscotting.

ENTRY ROOM (6)

The small entry room was typical of the period. The front door was secured with a plank laid across the opening. The storage bench held kindling and logs for the fire.



DINING ROOM (7)

The dining room is dominated by the beautiful china cabinet. When Vermont Yankee bought the house the cabinet had been cut and made narrower to fit into the kitchen corner. It was then removed and remained as a freestanding piece for many years. The restorer realized that the cabinet fit perfectly into the dining room when he found a ceiling beam notched to accept the cabinet's contours.

CHINA CABINET (8)

Inside the china cabinet door, you can see the bright green that was probably the original color of this room's walls. Because paint was very expensive, people used it only on their most formal rooms. However, because of the work put into stripping the wall panels and the garishness of the original peacock green paint, we opted to leave the room unpainted.

STAIRWAY (9)

The stairway is uncommonly simple with no ornate work or decoration. Other stairways of the time period were considerably more ornate.

MASTER BEDROOM (10)

Turn right, and you are now in the master bedroom. Bedrooms were sparsely furnished with a bed, night-stand, and tall chest of drawers. Wind whistling through the single paned windows must have made sleeping a real challenge. Heavy curtains were canopied over and around the bed to retain any warmth. The deep fireplace did little to help and probably allowed quite a bit of cold air to rush down the chimney.

The closet had been converted into a doorway accessing the back of the house, but it was closed to re-store the room's original condition.

As you walk across the house into the other bedroom, look up at the corner beam. Its narrow base and wide top are typical of early colonial architecture. The broad top allows more contact between the supporting beams, making a strong, secure joint.Though this style of building makes the structure more stable and was very fashionable for many decades, it later became un-popular for aesthetic reasons. To hide the outdated style, people cut the beam to be flush with the walls.

CHILDRENS' BEDROOM (11)

Believe it or not, this room was once divided into 3 smaller rooms. If you look closely, you can see where nail marks on the floor show the location of partitions. There is also a line on the middle wall panel showing where the dividing wall once stood. Doors between the two could be left open to let in heat from the fireplace. For some reason the room at the front of the house was fancier than the others. Perhaps this is where the oldest child slept. The walls were grain painted like the door to the back of the house. This painting style was very popular and very expensive for this era.

The door to the back of the house upstairs is *not* original, but modern fire codes require it.

SERVANT'S QUARTERS (12)

The back of the house looks so stark and unfinished, compared to other areas, because this was the area for servants' quarters. As you can see, the wood panels are knotty and the ceilings beams are simply ribbed. And there are no fireplaces—imagine how cold it must have been on long winter nights.

SOUTH ROOM (13)

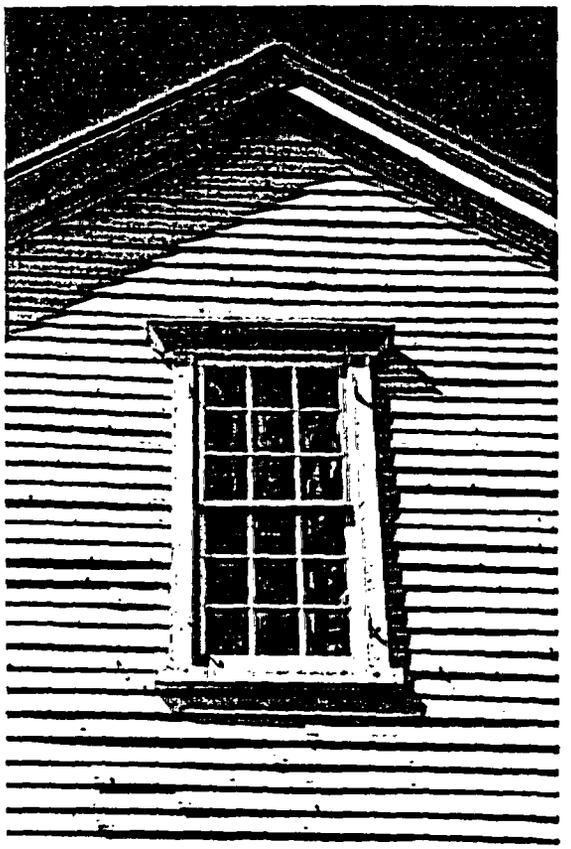
This first back room was never finished when Jonathan Hunt lived here. The walls were bare studs. However, it would not have been practical to go back to the unfinished state of this room for heating and touring purposes. The patch holes visible in the floor were left after plumbing and electrical wires were removed.

MIDDLE ROOM (14)

The small middle room is a good example of early colonial construction. You can see the large wooden spikes in the two corner beams. The white markings on the main ceiling beams are from a plaster ceiling that was put in some time after the house was built. However, the bevelling of the cross beams indicates that they were meant to be seen. Thus, the ceiling you're viewing appears as it did when Jonathan Hunt lived in this house. Another interesting feature of this small room is the closet. The coat rack board (without the pegs) was found in the attic and matched up perfectly with the nail holes in the chimney. Above the closet is a patch where a wood stove pipe had been placed by 20th century occupants.

NORTH ROOM (15)

The next upstairs room also had a lower plaster ceiling added but once again bevelling indicates that the beams were meant to be viewed. The stairs had been moved to the center room, ending in the middle of the kitchen. By matching ghost lines (shadows on wood caused by aging, smoke, or light), the restorers were able to determine that the original stairs were located where you see them now. Studying ghost lines also revealed the location of the back rooms' walls.



PANTRY (17)

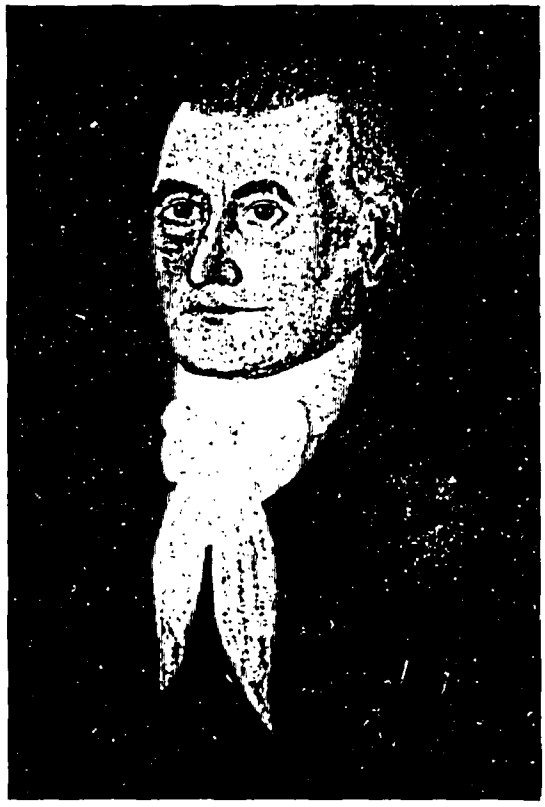
The pantry was probably on the colder North side to keep things fresh. The varying height of the shelves allows for convenient storage.

Old News

While unbricking the fireplace's newer additions, workmen found pieces of 1814 and 1820 Farmer's Almanac in the beehive ovens. They also discovered a small glass vial with a toothache gum label.

KITCHEN (16)

Descend the back stairs and you'll find yourself in the kitchen. Designed to be very utilitarian, the large fireplace allows for cooking with easy access to the fire and beehive oven. Large iron cranes swung pots over the fire. A large table for preparing meals would have dominated the room. Touching the walls, you can feel the hand planed paneling which was very expensive and time consuming.



Jonathan Hunt
1738 - 1823

NOW THAT YOU'VE toured the house he built and lived in, you might enjoy getting to know Jonathan Hunt himself a little better. Born in Northfield, Massachusetts on September 12, 1738, he was one of seven children of Captain Samuel and Anna (Ellsworth) Hunt. Samuel Hunt was a prominent land speculator in New England, with holdings in Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont. When his father died, Jonathan was left land in Hinsdale on the West side of the river (now Vernon). He and his younger brother Elisha assisted in the first clearing of land in Guilford in 1758 when Jonathan was 20 years old and Elisha 18.

PUBLIC SERVANT AND POLITICIAN...

Jonathan Hunt was a leading member of society and held numerous public offices. He became a major in 1780, sheriff of Windham County in 1781 (for which he received a yearly salary of £2000), and served as high

sheriff in 1782. In 1783, he was appointed judge of county court and was elected as a member of the convention of 1791.

In November 1775, Jonathan Hunt was recommended to New York as second colonel of the lower regiment in Cumberland (now Windham) County, which office he declined. In May 1777, he was clerk of the town of Hinsdale, (now Vernon) and chosen a delegate for that town. On May 2, 1780, he was appointed by the Yorkers as special messenger to Governor Clinton, who sent him to Congress, and on the 23rd Hunt subscribed an affidavit to the fact that Vermont was about to enforce its authority over the people of the New Hampshire Grants. In October of the same year he was one of several leading Yorkers who instituted measures for forming a new state comprising the territory lying between the Mason line in New Hampshire and the ridge of the Green Mountains. This resulted in the union of the eastern and western districts with Vermont.

In 1783, he represented Vernon in the General Assembly and acted as county court judge. He was elected Councillor from 1786 to 1794, and, also in 1794, was elected Lieutenant Governor in joint assembly. He "prayed to be excused the acceptance of his appointment," but was eventually prevailed upon to accept. In 1795 he was elected to the same office by the people. He was a member of the Vermont Convention of 1791 which adopted the U.S. Constitution.

GRANTSMANSHIP...

Jonathan Hunt was strongly Yorkist in his politics, and was one of the prime movers behind the effort to have Vermont become part of New York state. By 1783, however, Hunt seems to have decided that the republic of Vermont was going to make it on her own. That year he ran for, and was elected to, the office of town representative to the legislature from Hinsdale, the New Hampshire-granted town that spanned the Connecticut River in the area of present-day Vernon. In 1786, he was elected to the Governor and Council, and took his seat with that body in February 1787. Apparently one of his first acts was to file a petition for land with the legislature. In brief, the petition states that Hunt and his co-petitioners had been granted their lands in Hinsdale by Governor Benning Wentworth of New Hampshire, but that Governor Tryon of New York had later patented the same land to a British officer, who demanded that Hunt and the other Wentworth grantees pay him for the land that they were occupying. The petition went on to say that Hunt

and his party had been put to great expense in defending their right to the land. Even New York's Governor Tryon had been so sorry about the conflicting claims that he had offered them 35,000 acres, anywhere they wanted, as compensation. Hunt and his friends had not accepted the Governor's offer, however, and so they asked Vermont to give them land "in consideration of the equity of their case ...that your Honors would be pleased to grant them such a quantity of vacant land...as shall appear just and equitable." Two weeks later, the committee appointed to look into the matter reported that the facts were true, and recommended that the legislature make the grant. The legislative grant was made in October 1787, and the charter was issued in 1789, after the granting fees had been paid.

Although the legislature sided with Hunt, there were a few unusual aspects to the matter. Hunt was patented land in New York in 1774. In a separate deal, he was included among the grantees of Groton, and he and his brother Arad were given a grant of 600 acres in Vermont. Even more strange, Hunt received almost $1,000 out of the $30,000 that Vermont paid New York to discharge the claims of land owners who had held patents from that government.

HUSBAND, FATHER, HOMEMAKER...

On July 15, 1779, Jonathan Hunt married Lavinia Swan of Boston. She is described as a "woman of superior intellectual endowments, a former pupil of President John Adams." She was a bright, creative woman, who suggested the name for what is now Vernon, ("Green City") Vermont. It is a tribute to her influence that Vernon is the only Vermont town named by a woman. It was for his wife that Jonathan Hunt built the Vernon house, which was completed in 1789 (the same year that he was granted the town of Huntsburg, named in his honor). Fittingly, the house was long a center for early New England's best and brightest.

Jonathan and Lavinia Hunt had 6 children, several of whom went on to their own noteworthy careers.

Their first child, Jonathan, was born on August 12, 1780, but lived only until December 4th of that same year.

Eleanor, born October 19, 1781, married Lewis R. Morris, a Vermont Congressman. Eleanor was

reportedly very beautiful, and a town—Ellenboro—was named after her.

Their daughter Anne (whose birth date has been lost) married Dr. Perley Marsh, and founded the Brattleboro Retreat, now a prestigious psychiatric hospital, in 1834.

Frances, born on February 7, 1783, married Charles Blake, and died on July 8, 1856.

The Hunts' second son was born on May 12, 1787. Like the first son, who had died in infancy, this male child was given the name Jonathan. He graduated from Dartmouth in 1807, represented Brattleboro in the State Legislature in 1816-1817, and was elected first president of the Bank of Brattleboro in 1821. Elected a Vermont Representative in 1824, he served until his death in 1832.

Arad, Jonathan and Lavinia's last child, was born on September 22, 1790, and died August 3, 1833.

Jonathan Hunt's final years were spent in some pain and infirmity before he died on June 1, 1823, at age eighty-five.

His obituary provided the following touching testimonial:

In early life, he shared in the fatigues and anxieties incident to the perilous state of those who plant themselves in the wilderness, liable to privations and and the depredations of savages. Preserving industry, strict integrity, laudable ambition, and well-deserved promotion to many honorable offices, civil and military, to that of lieutenant-governor of the State, rendered him a distinguished character during the struggles of the New Hampshire grantees and the New York claimants during the Revolutionary War, the formation of our State government.... He preserved through his long life, and amidst his temporal prosperity, the most unassuming and unaffected deportment, and what is always highly honorable in the rich as well the poor, the reputation of an honest man.

VERNON, VERMONT

Vernon's charter, dating from 1672, is Vermont's oldest. Four Indians gave the land to William Clark and John King in exchange for 57 pounds of trading goods and 200 fathoms of Wampum (beads of polished shells used by Indians as money). According to some accounts, Jonathan Hunt's grandfather was a witness to deeds made at Northfield, Massachusetts, August 13, 1687, by sundry Indians which conveyed an area of land six miles by twelve, then within the limits of Massachusetts, but which covered the present towns of Hinsdale, New Hampshire, and Vernon, Vermont. The first settlers of Vernon were from Northfield and Northampton, Massachusetts.

Vernon has been part of four states and four different counties.

Northfield, Massachusetts
Hampshire County

Hinsdale, New Hampshire
Cheshire County

Hinsdale, New York
Cumberland County

Vernon, Vermont
Windham County

By 1779, four states claimed Vernon— Vermont, New Hampshire, New York, and Massachusetts. New York and New Hampshire had been fighting for the territory for 15 years, from 1749 to1764. Eventually, the king of England decided in favor of New York and made the Connecticut River the western boundary of New Hampshire. Thus Hinsdale West, as Vernon was then known, became part of Vermont, and was renamed Vernon in 1802.